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Motorsport

Mid-Ohio, 30 June 2002

Audi takes 1-2 in Mid-Ohio thriller

With a 1-2 victory in round three of the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) at Mid-Ohio, Audi revenged last year's defeat by Panoz. But also this time, it proved that it is not enough to have the fastest car on the winding track in the heart of Ohio. Both Infineon Audi R8 sportscars of Team Audi Sport North America were a second per lap faster than the Panoz cars. Heavy traffic and a total of five caution periods always voided the advantage the Audi drivers had gained.

Dramatic final stages of the race were the consequence which even saw eventual race winners Frank Biela and Emanuele Pirro drop behind the fastest Panoz. At the same time, the crew of the companion Infineon Audi R8 choose a courageous strategy by not bringing in their car for the second scheduled fuel stop. For the surprise of the competitors, Tom Kristensen was able to complete 62 laps in a row thanks to the economical fuel consumption of the FSI engine in the rear of his Audi without refuelling. The fuel gamble nearly paid off, but shortly before the end of the 2:45 hour race, the stock of fuel in the tank of his R8 was almost drawn to an end. About 300 metres before the finish, Kristensen dropped behind Pirro, who had meanwhile repassed Jan Magnussen in the Panoz and made it over the finish line with the last drops of fuel in second place in front of the two Panoz cars.

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Johnny Herbert and Stefan Johansson with the 2001-spec R8 of Audi customer team Champion were unlucky: The duo were temporarily second between the two "works" Audi cars. Just before half distance, however, Johnny Herbert was touched by a lapped GT car and ended up in the gravel. This incident and the following repairs of a damaged rear suspension made him lose nine laps and the lead in the overall classification of the ALMS to Tom Kristensen.

Two weeks following the historic triumph at Le Mans, Audi has once more displayed "Vorsprung durch Technik" with four victories in one day: 1-2 in the ALMS, a victory for Michael Galati in an Audi S4 in the Speed World Challenge GT race at Mid-Ohio – and two further successes of the Abt team's Abt-Audi TT-R in the DTM season highlight at the Norisring in Nürnberg, Germany.

Quotes after the race

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "Of course we were lucky because the other car ran out of fuel. But on the other hand they were lucky that they were able to finish the race at all. We were leading from the beginning and did one more stop to be on the safe side. This strategy just worked out. Our car was running very well while the traffic was bad as usual – but this was the same for everybody."

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Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "During the whole race the car was really good, I just missed the second to last restart and lost two positions. The race was open until the end. I knew what tires Tom was on and that he was leading because he did not stop for fuel. On the last two laps I realized that Tom was slowing down, so I guessed he was on reserve and had to save fuel. This was a thrill."

Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "In the beginning, it was very hard for me in the traffic. I had some little problems because the rear diffuser was damaged at the start. But the car was still very good. We were hoping to take the victory until the very last meters, but a race is over only when you see the chequered flag. Unfortunately, Mid-Ohio was unlucky for us again, but we are already looking forward to next Sunday's race at Road America."

Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "The team told me to conserve fuel and tires. We used a leaner engine map. This almost worked out thanks to conservative driving, but in the end we did not win. But it shows that the FSI engine has very low fuel consumption and our engineers are very brave. We tried a tough strategy and we did not win. But considering we started fifth and finished second I am very proud of the team."

Johnny Herbert (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "I passed a Porsche heading into turn five and he turned in on me causing me to spin into the gravel. The car was pretty damaged and also had a tire puncture. That put us some laps down even though the Champion team was able to make very quick repairs allowing us to finish competitively."

Stefan Johansson (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "For me it was a quiet weekend, I didn't get many laps. We have given Johnny the maximum laps because of the point situation in the championship. The Champion guys did a great job getting the car back out as we were turning competitive laps after the repair."

Ralf Jüttner, Technical Director Team Audi Sport North America: "What a race! Emanuele dropped behind Magnussen on a restart, but was able to fight past him again. For sure it was a risk not calling Tom into the pits for refuelling. He saved fuel very well and the FSI engine did its part – but in the end he missed it out by 300 meters. Thankfully he was able to save second place. For the championship, this result is worth gold."

Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Head of Audi Sport: "Our two teams tried different strategies. I am sure that Tom did a new record in low fuel consumption, but in the end he was 300 meters short of fuel. It was exciting until the finish. This was a great race, both R8 cars ran consistently fast over the whole distance. The drivers squeezed everything out of the cars under this heat showing that you can achieve any form of record with the FSI engine."

Race results

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|--|-----------|
| 1. Pirro/Biela (Infineon Audi R8) | 111 laps |
| 2. Capello/Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8) | + 6.248s |
| 3. Magnussen/Brabham (Panoz) | + 24.955s |

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4. Herta/Auberlen (Panoz)	+ 40.230s
5. Weaver/Dyson/Leitzinger (R&S-Lincoln)	- 2 laps
6. Fellows/O'Connell (Chevrolet)	- 5 laps
7. Pilgrim/Collins (Chevrolet)	- 6 laps
8. Duno/Maxwell (Panoz-Mugen)	- 7 laps
9. Neuhaus/Field (Lola-Judd)	- 8 laps
10. Herbert/Johansson (Audi R8)	- 9 laps

Photos and further information can be found on the internet:

www.audi-sportpress.com (accreditation required)

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